

Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel Hubbard Bell, December 12, 1885, with transcript

Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel (Hubbard) Bell. L Gilsey House, New York, Sunday, Dec. 12 (?) 1885.

My heart is overflowing with thoughts of you my dear good little angel of a wife — and perhaps the best thing for you and for me — is to let it overflow! — on paper — before “Science” or anything else claims my attention.

I have found by experience that I can only deal with one thing at a time. My mind concentrates itself on the subject that happens to occupy it and then all things else in the Universe — including father — mother — wife — children — life itself — become for the time being of secondary importance.

You are all in all in my thoughts just now — and now is the time to write. If I once settle down to that article for Science farewell to all hopes of a letter to you tonight. I might indeed force myself to write but it would be simply an act of duty and not — as now — a labor of love. Words — without soul — like too many of the letters I have written to you of late years. The letter I wrote you from Edgartown is the first letter I really enjoyed writing since the old old days when I wooed you with my pen! Wasn't I deceitful then? The midnight hours I spent over letters that were copied in a hurry to impress you with the idea of my ability. Oh! cupid! cupid! The naughty boy — what did he make me do it for! It wasn't the copying that troubled my conscience — it was the deceit of the thing. The wilful barefaced deceit. Cupid had succeeded in hitting me very hard and stifled Conscience by whispering in my ear 2 “All is fair in Love and War.” And what of it after all — now that I have got you my dear and owned up to the truth at last!

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If I did copy my letters — it gave you pleasure to read them and gave me pleasure to write them — and they were the honest expression of my heart after all. Truth underlay them if there was the shadow of a deceit upon the surface.

And if I failed to express in fit and proper language the thoughts that were really inside struggling for utterance — why not try again? Why not write and re-write until the expression became more consistent with the thought. Then why should not due respect for you and self-respect for myself lead me to send you a clean copy and destroy the old. I love you now my dear ten thousand times more than I did then — and with more cause. You have been my good angel from the very first. All that I am to-day I owe to you and yours. I love you darling more than you can ever know — or I can ever tell you though I were to set it down on paper and write it and re-write it to all eternity. And if I love you more than in the olden time — shall I respect you less? Is a rough and scribbled letter good enough to send to you if I would be ashamed to show it to a stranger? Is it any less obligating on me now than it was then — to throw away the rough draft and send you a fair copy? I am sure it is not and I will write to you now — as of old — but without the deceit. You were a little girl then — younger than your years — while I was a man — burning with a fierce passion that you could not comprehend.

My heart was empty — desolate — and lonely — hungering for 3 your love — but you could not understand it at all. You were so young and innocent and pure — that the first hint of such a thing shocked you — and frightened you away from my side. How well I remember it all — and how I looked at you in your happy home — much as a friendless beggar looks into the windows of a cheerful room. The blazing fire — the comfortable meal — the luxury and love — are not for him. How desolate and hopeless it all seemed to me then — and how it all comes back to me now.

I have a vision of a fair young girl — with a wealth of glorious hair — seated at her mother's feet — and that was you my dear at the moment when your mother startled me with the news of your approaching departure. Your head was on her lap while she played

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with your hair and a beautiful soft white arm rested lovingly upon her knee. How well I remember the scene — and how I longed for your love.

How I longed to take you in my arms and tell you what was in my heart and how hopeless it all seemed. Could it be possible that that fair young girl would ever nestle in my arms? Would the time ever come when I should feel those soft white arms around my neck or dare to touch that glorious hair? And then I thought how gentle and kind I would be to you and how my great strong love would shield you and compass you round so that you should never know or realize the affliction that had clouded your life. This thought gave me comfort and hope and I spoke to your mother; and then how deep and bitter was the blow when I knew that my rashness had driven you away. Oh my darling how hopeless it all seemed to me then! I had lost you and wounded your feelings — and you had gone from me for ever. And then the marvelous miraculous change and I clasped my sweet girl-wife in my arms and you gave me your love. Please don't laugh at me now my darling for the tears are in my eyes as I sit here alone and think of it all.

How good and patient you have been to me since and how often I have tried you and made you unhappy without cause. I bless you my darling for all the comfort and happiness you have brought into my life. Eight years have passed since then and I love you more and more. I have learned what a true and noble woman you have become. I am proud of you my dear and honor you in my heart as much as I love you. In whatever position you have been placed — you have come out true as steel. In business matters you succeed where I fail and now you are taking hold of my affairs to help me out. In the midst of danger you have been calm and courageous. In Rome when a great dread was on us both — how brave you were through it all. And when death came and robbed us of the little ones we wanted so much you forgot your own suffering to try and comfort me. Dear — dear Mabel. My true sweet wife — nothing will ever comfort me for the loss of these two babes for I feel at heart that I was the cause. I do not grieve because they were boys but because I believe that my ignorance and selfishness caused their deaths and injured you. In the first child's case one cause seems clear both to you and me. After his death I prevented you

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from fully recovering and gave you another child before you were well. You have not even yet completely recovered and I believe you never will until you have had a complete and prolonged 5 rest. I am thankful my darling, that no other child has come to risk your life again. I have trembled for you more than once and when you were disappointed I confess that I was glad. Before you can with safety bear another child you must be well yourself. I have been thinking dear of all that you have done for me and how little I have ever done for you. How unselfish and true you have been. I pause here in New York and ask myself whether it is best for you that I should return just now. Think seriously of it my darling wife and telegraph whether to come or stay. I might as well proceed to Boston and Maine now as at a later time and you can call me home when it seems best. Not only would I advise this plan but even think you might with benefit take a little trip when I return. I do not believe that anything short of our complete separation for a time will secure to you that perfect rest that I am sure you need to make you well.

If we spend a couple of months in making ourselves strong and well you will soon have another sweet baby-face smiling in your arms. I hope for your sake a little girl like our sweet Elsie and Daisy. I will remain here until you telegraph me whether to stay or come.

Your loving, Alec.